

Make People Furniture

Turn your friend into a piece of furniture! Get out your jigsaw, house paint, and imagination. You're going to make a 3-D portrait to sit on.

With his People Furniture, Jeff London turned his subject's idiosyncrasies into semi-functional art that offered a place to sit and amusing conversation. He loved to "furniturize" people, embellishing their identity and allowing others to cozy up to them. His family, politicians, and rock stars all became chairs for Jeff.

For a while, Jeff made a living turning couples into loveseats and almost hit it big with a line of animal friend furniture for kids. His legacy lives on each time someone is sparked by their imagination to take a whack at making their own People Furniture.

Have fun making a piece of furniture that resembles a friend or a public personality. Should they be a chair? A bed? A coat rack? "Perchance your mind does roam other realms," Jeff would say. "Take note of the form your friend takes." Soon a bigger-than-life personable conversation partner will add color to your room. Let their quirkiness bring a smile.

Think big!

This thing you are going to make will be at least the size of an easy chair—some have been large enough to climb on or get inside of. If you aren't much of a builder, remember a chair is simply a wooden box with one side that's too long. Once you have the frame, you can build out from there. If you already construct stuff, this is an opportunity to push your limits in the direction of amusement and audacity. You may need a month or three to get this done.

When Jeff made a chair of the President of the United States, he drove it to DC—alas, his van broke down on the Jersey Turnpike. Eventually, Furniture POTUS arrived, only to get lost in the bureaucracy. But the story lives on.

Materials needed

Anything goes, but a good starting point is plywood, a jigsaw, wood glue and clamps, screws, brushes, and paint (primer, latex, and varnish). If you have access to a table saw, that helps for the occasional straight edges that let you join planes into something structural enough to hold your weight. Of course, you can also weld it, plaster it, knit it, sew it, or stuff it.

Making it

- 1. Pick your person.** Who will you celebrate? This could be quite a birthday present. Take the chance to make someone feel special or have the celebrity spotlight shine on your piece.
- 2. Put them in context.** Futurize your person in action—their vocation, hobbies, dreams, pet peeves, and particularities all make for fun fodder. By representing your person doing the activities they love, in their particular manner, you make them more approachable. Soon we will be sitting on their lap, playing with their ideas and having a conversation with them.

- 3. Note their idiosyncrasies.** What makes this person unique? Which details could you exaggerate? Poke fun of? Use in your narrative? Let their quirkiness bring a smile.
- 4. Sketch it out.** Shape your brainstorm into a rough design. What will this thing look like? How is it structured? Are you making it from scratch or incorporating some pre-existing objects? Once you have the overall impression, think about what holds it all together.
- 5. Prototype.** Making a little model may help. At least sketch out the parts and measurements, so you'll know what materials you will be needing.
- 6. Get to work.** Put the big parts together first and make sure the thing is stable. From there you can add your silhouettes and accoutrements. Once it is framed out, you can paint it, attach cushions, and do the details.
- 7. Let it grow.** Add-ons and embellishments will certainly spring to mind as you are making your sculpture. Go ahead and attach that leash, pillow, or thought bubble.

Share your story

What's the story with your piece? You have a character, what's their plot? How have they developed? What did they, and you, overcome to be here now?

Make a portrait you can sit on



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